



# ACIFA: WORKING FOR YOU



## Introduction

The Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA) is an association of associations. ACIFA interfaces primarily with the associations who represent faculty members, but ACIFA is committed to inform individual faculty members of the work done in fulfillment of ACIFA's mission to advance the economic and professional well-being of all faculty members. **This booklet will introduce you to ACIFA**, especially if you are not in regular contact with our work or staff and wondering what it is ACIFA actually does.

ACIFA currently represents thirteen Faculty Associations—ten colleges, two polytechnic institutes, and one university in Alberta. Specifically, ACIFA currently represents:

- Alberta University of the Arts Faculty Association (AUAFA)
- Grande Prairie Regional College Academic Staff Association (GPRC ASA)
- Keyano College Faculty Association (KCFA)
- Lakeland College Faculty Association (LCFA)
- Lethbridge College Faculty Association (LCFA)
- Medicine Hat College Faculty Association (MHCFA)
- NAIT Academic Staff Association (NASA)
- NorQuest College Faculty Association (NQCFA)
- Northern Lakes College Faculty Association (NLCFA)
- Olds College Faculty Association (OCFA)
- Portage College Faculty Association (PCFA)
- Faculty Association of Red Deer College (FARDC)
- SAIT Academic Faculty Association (SAFA)

ACIFA represents approximately 5,000 individual faculty members, serving approximately 50,000 students. We trust that after reading this booklet, you will have a better idea of the work we do on your behalf.

## Acknowledgements

This publication required the input and hard work of many people. It is impossible to thank everyone who was involved. However, I would like to acknowledge the following people by name for their dedication in bringing this publication to print:

- ACIFA's Presidents' Council who, on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, approved the opinions and positions in this publication as ACIFA's official position on each topic
- Dr. Michael Smith for editing
- Rika van den Heever for the layout and formatting
- Justin Kautz for technical backup and editing
- The faculty members and photographers who allowed us to use their pictures in this publication (All photographs in this publication are of ACIFA faculty members at ACIFA institutions or events.)
- ACIFA's Executive for their selfless work which enables individual instructors to focus on teaching and serving students

## Dedication

**To every individual faculty member who teaches, works, and serves at an ACIFA affiliated school: thank you for your dedication.**

Confucius said, *'Every piece of marble has a statue in it waiting to be released by a person of sufficient skill to chip away the unnecessary parts. Just as the sculptor is to the marble, so is education to the soul. It releases it.'*

Thank you for releasing the next generation of Albertans to be who they were intended to be.

## Facilitated and Compiled by

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ACIFA President 2016 to 2020

April 2019

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# What Does ACIFA Do for Me?



## What Does ACIFA Do for Me?

Occasionally instructors ask “What does ACIFA do for an individual faculty member like me?” and understandably so. Because ACIFA is an association of associations, it primarily interacts with faculty associations and less so with individual faculty members. Nevertheless, ACIFA is driven by academic concerns which affect members as a group, as well as concerns experienced by individual faculty members, as relayed through your faculty association. So, what does membership in ACIFA do for you?

In brief, ACIFA:

- Serves as a provincial voice for faculty members
- Provides labour relations support to all ACIFA members
- Establishes and manages a province-wide defence fund
- Puts together well-researched opinion papers on issues which are important to instructors
- Advocates for quality post-secondary education
- Conducts annual workplace climate surveys
- Facilitates information exchange between ACIFA's Faculty Association Presidents
- Exercises our voice on the stakeholder boards of our pension fund
- Organizes an annual teaching and learning spring conference
- Maintains two special focus committees: NAC and PAC
- Makes submissions to the Alberta Labour Board
- Draws from the experience of like-minded associations in other provinces
- Represents members at the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)
- Provides a way to be part of a larger community

What follows is a more detailed explanation of each of the above.

### Provincial Voice for Faculty Members

ACIFA represents faculty interests in province wide decision-making bodies such as the Government of

Alberta, Campus Alberta, Pension Fund Stakeholder Boards, and the Campus Alberta Quality Council. Whether through face-to-face meetings with the Minister of Advanced Education, submissions that influence the provincial budget, or campaigns that promote the important role post-secondary education has in Alberta's success—ACIFA lives up to its mission to advance the economic and professional well-being of faculty members.

### Labour Relations Support

ACIFA's labour relations function is an important one from which individual faculty members directly benefit. ACIFA's Labour Relations Officer (LRO) provides ongoing assistance to member associations through his presence at bargaining tables, by providing advice on grievances and as a representative on arbitration boards when required. This support for labour advice and counseling is particularly valuable to ACIFA's smaller member associations who do not have a full time LRO employed. Also, ACIFA's labour relations support remains a valuable service to ACIFA's larger member associations, because they can call on ACIFA's LRO to serve on arbitration boards and provide input on grievances.

### Defence Fund

At ACIFA's Annual General Meeting in May 2018, the decision was made to establish a province-wide defence fund to which each individual faculty member at each college and technical institute will contribute. The money in the fund is professionally managed and is designated for one purpose only: to provide financial support to individual faculty members, through their association, during a job action. Establishing such a collective fund benefits each faculty member since they only need to make a small regular contribution, while the economy of scale allows the fund to grow rapidly.

### Opinion Papers

Part of ACIFA's function is to be a provincial voice for post-secondary education and as such we produce well-researched opinion papers covering



## What Does ACIFA Do for Me?

issues important to all of us as post-secondary educators. Some of these papers are included in this booklet. These papers cover issues such as academic freedom, the institutional funding model and the appropriate use of student evaluations. As a collective voice on post-secondary education, these opinion papers advocate best-practices and influence debates, and by extension, the policies formulated around these issues at individual schools and governing bodies.

### Advocating for Quality Post-Secondary Education

ACIFA continually advocates for quality post-secondary education. We continue to assert that quality post-secondary education can be best provided in an environment of stable, predictable funding; and so, ACIFA has vigorously pushed back against austerity measures and funding cuts. Through collaboration with other provincial organizations, such as Public Interest Alberta (PIA) and the Council for Academic Faculty Associations (CAFA), we participated in successful public relations campaigns such as “Post-Secondary Education is the Answer,” and we will continue to do so in the future.

### Workplace Climate Survey

For more than a decade, ACIFA has been conducting annual climate surveys to gauge the atmosphere between faculty and administration at each school. Pointed questions are asked in these surveys around the administration’s transparency, commitment to professional development, consultation and communication style, efficiency of leadership, and use of resources to support the academic mission. The results of these surveys provide our member organizations with pointed information to use when interacting with the administrators at their schools and the Ministry of Advanced Education. The Ministry is often quite interested in these survey results, as are the Boards of Governors of individual institutions.

### Provincial Information Exchange

Faculty association presidents meet at ACIFA’s Presidents’ Council. This is where information is exchanged between faculty association (FA) presidents, where they learn from each other, and benefit from each other’s experience. The value of this information exchange can hardly be overstated. Discussing what issues individual ACIFA members are facing and how they are responding to those challenges prevents the same mistakes from being repeated at different schools, and forewarns each faculty association of possible upcoming issues.

### Pensions

ACIFA members belong to one of two pension funds: either the Local Authorities Pension Fund (LAPP) or the Public Service Pension Plan (PSPP). Recent changes to the governance structure of both of these pension funds were made under Bill 27, tabled in November 2018. ACIFA played a significant role in effecting the transition of control for our pension funds from the government to the stakeholders. Through this change, the management and oversight of these pension plans were brought under control of Stakeholder Boards; which consists of employers and employees. This restructuring was a significant change that will allow these pension plans to be more aligned with employee needs and desires.

Another recent event was that the LAPP pension fund reached the fully funded level. This allowed a *reduction* in pension contributions amounting to 1% of salary. Thus, a faculty member earning \$90,000 per year will be contributing \$900 per year *less* to the pension fund and still be guaranteed the same benefits at retirement.



## What Does ACIFA Do for Me?

### Annual Spring Conferences

As an individual faculty member, you may have attended one of ACIFA's well-organized annual spring conferences. Besides sharing teaching and learning strategies through inspired member talks and workshops, these conferences also offer a professional development focus. All ACIFA affiliated schools across the province recognize the benefit of the networking that takes place at these conferences between faculty members teaching in similar programs at different schools. Faculty members presenting at an ACIFA conference often receive financial support from the professional development funds of their school.

ACIFA affiliated schools take turns hosting the annual conference. This requires close cooperation between the hosting committee and the ACIFA office every year and allows for a unique local school approach.

### Special Focus Committees: NAC and PAC

ACIFA currently has two special focus committees: the Negotiations Advisory Committee (NAC) and the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC).

The purpose of NAC is to support collective bargaining at each ACIFA member school. This is accomplished through workshops and presentations which build capacity that equips bargaining teams to be more effective at their bargaining tables.

The purpose of PAC is to acknowledge and reward outstanding instructional performance by deciding on and allocating ACIFA's three awards for such an accomplishment. Annually, individual instructors are nominated by colleagues through a streamlined nomination process. Nominating a deserving peer for instructional excellence can be done online and is now easier than ever before. The awards come with attractive prizes to the individual winners and to their associations. Additionally, PAC discusses common issues related to professional affairs, from professional development to workplace safety and

other issues intended to safeguard the post-secondary teaching profession in Alberta.

### Submissions to the Labour Board

When an ACIFA member association files a case with the Alberta Labour Board, as happened when the Northern Lakes College Faculty Association took management to the Labour Board on the issue of the designation of front line supervisors (e.g. chairs) in April of 2018, the Board calls for intervener submissions.

An intervener submission can be provided when the Labour Board asks for a response from parties that have a stake in the outcome of the decision. This is *particularly* important with regard to post-secondary education in Alberta, because we are now operating under the Labour Code, as opposed to the Post-Secondary Learning Act, and Labour Board decisions will be precedent-setting.

When a call for interveners goes out from the Labour Board, ACIFA will submit a rational and well-argued position on behalf of all of our member associations. This collective action by ACIFA, means that the investigation of and consultation about an issue, as well as unavoidable legal costs, are not duplicated.





## What Does ACIFA Do for Me?

### National Information Exchange with Like-Minded Provinces

Faculty members benefit from the information exchanges between ACIFA and like-minded organizations across the country. These include organizations such as the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) in BC, the college division of the Ontario Public Sector Employees Union (OPSEU) in ON, and the Saskatchewan Polytechnic Faculty Association (SPFA) in SK. The benefits of learning from the experiences of other provincial associations is invaluable and made even more so now that we fall under the labour code. Because college teachers in other provinces have been living with the right to strike for decades, their help by explicating what this might mean for us is critical for our collective success as faculty members in Alberta.

### CAUT: Federated Member

As a federated member of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), we benefit from belonging to this country-wide association. Since 1951, CAUT has been the national voice of academic and professional staff across the country, now more than 72,000 in number. CAUT's work helps ensure that post-secondary educators have appropriate working

conditions so that individual faculty members can fulfill their mandate to provide quality education, to preserve and advance knowledge, and to serve their communities.

One of the many benefits we receive from CAUT is capacity building. For example, ACIFA's negotiating teams receive bargaining training workshops from CAUT experts.

### Belonging to a Larger Community

By being part of ACIFA, individual faculty members belong to a larger community through which we can support each other, learn from each other, act collaboratively and, in so doing, minimize the vulnerability of individuals and associations. By speaking with one collective voice, ACIFA strengthens the position of faculty members in the PSE sector across Alberta.

We are stronger together!





# The ACIFA Defence Fund



At the ACIFA AGM of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, at Jasper Park Lodge, we witnessed the establishment of the ACIFA Defence Fund when the motion to establish such a fund was passed unanimously.

## The Defence Fund

ACIFA accepted the establishment of a province-wide defence fund to which each individual faculty member at each college and technical institute that is an ACIFA member contributes. The money in the fund is designated for one purpose only: to financially support faculty members, through their respective association, during a job action.

Establishing such a fund collectively means each faculty member need only make a small, but regular, contribution. The large number of faculty members across the province will allow the fund to grow rapidly. These contributions, unlike regular ACIFA dues, will not be capped for bigger ACIFA institutional members because, in the event of a job action, every faculty member will need financial support.

## Legal Context

Until recently, faculty members at Colleges and Technical Institutes in Alberta did not have the right to strike. The only conflict resolution mechanism permitted by the Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA) was binding arbitration: an arrangement that generally served our sector well.

In 2008, the Saskatchewan provincial government declared all provincial employees to be essential service workers and thereby removed from them the right to strike. As a result of this decision, the unions took the case to the Supreme Court of Canada which, in 2015, declared the right to strike a constitutional right and instructed the Alberta government to bring the PSLA in line with the constitution. Consequently, Bill 7 was tabled in the Alberta legislature in the spring of 2016. Bill 7 effectively changed all faculty associations into unions with regard to bargaining and dispute resolution.

## The ACIFA Defence Fund

It should be noted that ACIFA did not ask or advocate for this change. Nevertheless, it is now law and we must adapt to this new labour reality. Establishing a defence fund is a logical and necessary response to this reality.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What If We Never Go on Strike?

ACIFA faculty members are not generally militant and taking a job action is not an attractive option to most of us. A possible way to prevent ever going on strike is to opt for final selection arbitration. This means that if we and our employer cannot reach an agreement through collective bargaining, each party puts forward a final offer for selection by an arbitrator. Both parties agree beforehand to abide by the arbitrator's decision.

Attractive as this option seems at first, it is not a long-term solution because both parties must agree to final selection arbitration at the beginning of *each* new round of bargaining. If employers at any time in the future choose not to resolve labour disputes via arbitration, it leaves faculty associations with few options other than a job action.

The new dispensation thus means that the right to strike (on the employee's side), and the right to lock out (on the employers' side), cannot be permanently negotiated away.





## The ACIFA Defence Fund

### How Much Will It Cost Me as an Individual Faculty Member?

The amount proposed is \$5 per month – the equivalent of a cup of coffee per month. This translates into \$60 per year. These additional contributions will not go into ACIFA's general fund, but will be designated exclusively for the Defence Fund which will be externally managed to ensure accountability and transparency.

### What Are the Direct Benefits I Can Expect from a Fund like This?

In the event of a job action, the ACIFA Defence Fund will pay a *per diem* of \$100 per day to each faculty member involved in the job action. Note that this payment is tax free, and that there are no EI or CPP deductions. The distribution of funds to individual faculty members on a job action will be conducted through their association. ACIFA will transfer the money to the faculty association on a job action who will then distribute it to individual faculty members.

### Why Should ACIFA Get Involved in Establishing a Defence Fund?

ACIFA's mission is to advance the professional and economic well-being of college and technical institute faculty members through collective action. Given the new legal context that Bill 7 has established, the only meaningful way to support ACIFA members with regard to a job action is to act collaboratively in the establishment of a defence mechanism.

Without a well-endowed defence fund, faculty members are likely to see an erosion of their academic freedom and economic well-being. In the absence of access to a strong fund, faculty association bargaining teams are more likely to capitulate at the bargaining table because they will not have the backing necessary to take a hard line on any issues of real importance to faculty.

Furthermore, the Defence Fund is a necessary precaution as we can now be locked out by our administrations as a cost saving mechanism.

In order to live up to our mission of effectively supporting members, ACIFA's best course of action is to build up the Defence Fund as soon as possible.

### What If We Have an Excellent Relationship with Management at Our College?

ACIFA has always been a strong defender of sound collegial governance and we will continue to be so. Such collegial governance is one of the hallmarks of the post-secondary education sector, and a governance principle worth advancing and upholding.

However, we must be realistic and learn from the experiences of other post-secondary institutions elsewhere in Canada. Administration and management of our institutions rarely remain static. An excellent relationship between a faculty association and management today may change dramatically tomorrow.

### Is Contributing to a Defence Fund Something like an Additional Tax?

Contributing to a defence fund is actually more comparable to buying insurance than to paying a tax. As with insurance, the more broadly the risk is distributed, the lower the unit cost per member. The ACIFA Defence Fund is the least expensive way to protect faculty against the vulnerabilities which we now face.

In addition, contributing to the Defence Fund has significant tax benefits. Your contribution to the fund is a tax-deductible expense while the benefits received from the fund during a job action is a non-taxable benefit.

### Does Belonging to the ACIFA Defence Fund Mean That Faculty Associations Need Not Establish Their Own Defence Fund?

A strike is a very expensive proposition. The operating cost (renting a strike headquarters, making picket signs, providing food and drink, and so on) can be as high as \$25,000 per week. In addition, members' pension and health benefits are not covered during a strike. The ACIFA Defence Fund will only support individual faculty members



financially. It is therefore advisable that faculty associations build up some internal resources to provide for the abovementioned expenses.

### **What If There Are Insufficient Funds Available in the Defence Fund When Our School Needs It?**

Experience elsewhere indicates that it is unlikely for more than one college or institute to be involved in a job action at the same time. The funds available in a properly built defence fund will thus be available to a specific school when a job action occurs.

It is also imperative that we support a job action at any ACIFA member school since significant changes to working conditions, academic freedom, job security, workload, and so on, are likely to affect all other colleges and institutes across the province. Administrations of all other schools are likely to take a win of any one school as precedent-setting during bargaining with their faculty association.

### **In Conclusion**

ACIFA members are not militant, and so the possibility of one of our ACIFA institutions going on strike in the foreseeable future is small. Nevertheless, the backing of a sizable defence fund will enable our bargaining teams to take strong positions on issues that are important to us and critical to student success. The ACIFA Defence Fund will also give bargaining teams the confidence necessary to avoid capitulating to undue pressure and avoid making unwise concessions. What is more, we shall not be starved into submission should the administration at any of our ACIFA schools decide to lock faculty out over a summer as a cost saving measure.

Let us hope that we never need to use the ACIFA Defence Fund and let us continue to support the principles of collegial governance: something for which ACIFA has always been a strong proponent.

## **The ACIFA Defence Fund**



ACIFA AGM, Jasper Park Lodge, May 15, 2018



## ACIFA's Position on Institutional Funding

### Overview

Government funding for individual schools is critically important for the continued success of Alberta's post-secondary institutions.

The goal of any funding review should not be to lower financial support to post-secondary education, but rather to support continued excellence in teaching and scholarly activity. Any review should not only focus on the distribution of existing resources amongst institutions, but also ask if current funding levels for post-secondary education (PSE) are adequate given the tremendous benefits a well-functioning PSE system provides to a society.

The funding of our post-secondary institutions should strike an appropriate balance between the tangible benefits to Albertan society and the benefits to the individuals successful in their post-secondary education. Because the benefits of PSE are both individual and collective, an appropriate balance must be found between individual student contributions (tuition fees) and taxpayers' contributions.

### Principles to Guide the Funding Model:

- Funding to post-secondary education is an investment, not merely an expense. There is overwhelming evidence that spending on PSE generates higher rates of return to society than resources dedicated to almost any other public service (Christophersen and Robison, 2003).
- Funding levels should be sufficient to maintain, strengthen and protect the core mandates of PSE institutions.
- Funding levels should be stable and predictable to allow for optimal functioning and planning at PSE institutions. The recent practice of increasing operating grants by 2% per year (appreciated as that was, given the resource pressure the provincial government was under) is barely sufficient to compensate for inflationary pressure.

- Funding should not be punitive, but should focus on the long-term health of a balanced society. Allocating resources efficiently cannot mean that post-secondary institutions have to face the continuous threat of losing funding. Especially when these institutions are unable to meet annual performance targets due to circumstances beyond their control.
- Funding should be fair and equitable and should consider the impact that post-secondary institutions have on their community.
- Alignment of funding with core mandates will help protect the diversity in our post-secondary education system in Alberta and prevent mandate drift.
- The allocation of resources among institutions should guard against the development of a wide variation of quality across the system.
- Funding levels should be sufficient to prevent continued casualization of academic work.
- Should the funding formula for the PSE system in Alberta be amended, it should be simple to understand and administer. A funding formula should add to transparency and should not be one that can be easily manipulated.

### An Investment Rather Than an Expense

It is necessary to weigh the benefit and "return on investment" that post-secondary education brings to Alberta's society and economy.

In their wide-ranging study of the socio-economic benefits generated by community colleges and technical institutes in Alberta, Christophersen and Robison (2003) came to the conclusion that the benefits are both private and public. The private benefits to the individual student are well known—a more rewarding career and a generally higher earning capacity. The public benefits, enjoyed by society, stem from savings (or avoided costs) associated with improved health and lifestyle habits, lower crime rates, and lower incidence of social assistance and unemployment—all of which are correlated with higher education of the individual.

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, there are also significant non-material benefits that a well-functioning post-secondary education system brings to Albertan society, such as diverse arts and cultural activities that enrich the quality of life. As well, post-secondary education cultivates the creativity necessary to address our social, technological and environmental issues through science, technology and business ventures.

However, the bulk of these benefits only manifest themselves over the longer term, as the effects of higher education accumulate over the lifespan of its recipients, while the cost of PSE must be incurred in the present. Therefore, funding to PSE institutions should be sufficient not only to ensure immediate operating needs are met, but should also be sufficient to respond to changing societal demands. The PSE sector plays a central and irreplaceable role in equipping the labour force with the skills necessary to support and strengthen the economy. It is therefore shortsighted financial management to reduce spending on PSE which contributes to society's long-term well-being in such a variety of ways.



### Goals of Accessibility, Affordability, and Quality

ACIFA appreciates and supports the goals of accessibility, affordability, and quality PSE. In order to achieve them, however, all three goals should be realized simultaneously. For example, if affordability (through tuition freezes) is achieved at the expense of educational quality (such as program cuts and increased class sizes) then the intent of these goals is undermined. To prevent this from happening, PSE institutions should be compensated for funding shortfalls brought about by any tuition freezes.

### Minimizing Duplication

Even if we use our current resources well, finding efficiencies through the minimizing of duplication within the system can reduce our resource use. The main source of duplication currently is mandate drift: institutions encroaching on each other's mandate. This is possible because under the current funding practice, institutions have the leeway to re-invent themselves and change the roles that they were assigned by the architects of the six sector model. This ability to change mandates has unintentionally led to duplication of functions, services and programs. A great deal of efficiency can be found if institutions fulfill only the roles for which they were designed and deliver only the programs and services set out in their mandates, instead of expanding into each other's territory. This is arguably the main weakness of the current funding model: it has made it possible to inadvertently undermine the structured diversity in our PSE system.

A second major source of efficiency can be found in tying funding to core mandates. The current funding formula enables resources to be drained away from core mandates such as teaching, and instead, funneled into activities that are only peripherally related to the core mandates. Many of these functions are nice to have, but not essential. Some of the most notable examples include centers of entrepreneurship, centers of excellence or centers of leadership. Too often these take PSE institutions away from their core mandates—something which can perhaps be justified during times of affluence,

but during times of scarcity core mandates must take priority.

### Administrative Densification

A further drain of resources from core mandates in PSE institutions is the expansion of administrative personnel relative to academic positions. The number of non-teaching positions, such as associate deans, department heads, and managers, has been expanding at an increasing rate in all of our educational institutions. This syphons funds away from the core functions of education and often does not contribute to betterment of the system's core functioning.

In addition to minimizing duplication due to mandate drift and the diverting of resources into peripheral activities, there are still further efficiencies to be found in administrative as well as academic functions. For example:

- Moving our system from a competitive model to a collaborative one by finding mechanisms that enable institutions to cooperate.
- Improving the currently used credit transfer system in the province between PSE institutions, even though it is relatively robust.
- Sharing curriculum and programs between institutions, without compromising intellectual property.
- Where partnerships between institutions exist and where partnering institutions agree, combining or centralizing background office services, where applicable, may lead to greater efficiency.
- Sharing information systems between institutions for various functions such as financial analysis.
- Allowing similar institutions to work together on legislative compliance matters.
- Promoting collaboration between institutions in the same sub-sector to develop guidelines and policy manuals as it pertains to business they have in common.

The Government must also share some responsibility for burdening institutions with excessive and overlapping compliance tasks that only serve to increase administrative costs.

### A Funding Formula

It goes beyond the scope of this position paper to suggest a formula which will address the funding issues currently experienced by the PSE sector. Funding currently lacks standardization which leads to inconsistency, inequity, and a lack of transparency. However, given the diversity and complexity in this sector, we acknowledge that it might be difficult (even improbable) to standardize funding into a single formula.

Should the government attempt to develop a generally applied funding formula, it is vital that such a formula be robust enough to accommodate the diversity in the sector, yet simple enough to understand and administer.

In other jurisdictions where a funding formula is used to distribute resources in their PSE system, a student-centered approach is followed. In Alberta, it must be recognized that the cost to provide an education differs greatly between urban and rural PSE institutions. Using student enrollment numbers as a basis for resource allocation must take these differences in delivery cost as well as the broad role some institutions play in their local communities into consideration. Standardizing a funding formula will also require a collaborative data system within higher education that encourages transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

### Outcomes-Based Funding

Extensive international research has been done on outcomes-based funding in higher education. The questions investigated are whether outcomes-based funding is effective in motivating institutions to function more in line with their true mandates, to be more productive, or to be more in tune with labour market needs. There is an abundance of data to study—no fewer than 34 States in America have tried performance-based funding in some form or another. The design of these performance-based funding models varies greatly and the percentage of overall funding linked to performance criteria varies between 6 percent of total funding in Indiana, to 80 percent in Tennessee (Dougherty and Reddy, 2013).

An excellent report on this topic was published in 2014 by The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Aiming to produce a comprehensive policy-relevant perspective, the authors undertook a systematic review of outcomes-based funding models in the US, Canada, Australia and numerous European countries. At the end of this detailed analysis, they concluded that there is **little evidence that outcomes-based funding can be associated with improved student outcomes.**

Dougherty and Reddy (2013) studied the impact at different time horizons of outcomes-based funding in the various states in America where it is employed, viz. immediate impacts, intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes. *Immediate impacts* included institutional leaders' awareness of the policy goals of government and their institution's performance on relevant measurements as well as incorporation of outcomes-based funding requirements into financial decisions and institutional practice. *Intermediate outcomes* included student outcomes such as improved completion rates, retention rates, transfers, credit completion thresholds, and successful completions of remediation. *Ultimate outcomes* included completion of degrees or certificates as well as workforce outcomes.

The authors found that policies appear to be less focused on ultimate outcomes such as graduation and job placements and more focused on intermediate outcomes. They also found evidence that institutional leadership's awareness of their own performance and of the stated goals of higher education was higher in states in the U.S.A. with performance-based funding, in addition to evidence that these policies affected institutions' financial decisions. However, no evidence was found that outcomes-based funding policies affected (or improved) an institution's capacity as a learning organization, or that outcomes-based funding was associated with improved student outcomes in the U.S. context. For Alberta, ACIFA believes if funds are allocated based on performance/outcome criteria, it may result in winners and losers among institutions, which will negatively impact students who attend "losing" institutions.

It should be noted that outcomes-based funding, then called "performance envelopes" has been tried in Alberta before and found to be unsustainable (Barnetson and Boberg, 2000). The intent was to provide a mechanism to award annual performance and introduce mandate-specific indicators, external benchmarks and third-party performance assessments. The performance envelope model was discontinued after only three years, because it was found too difficult to administer.

In addition to the lack of evidence that outcomes-based funding achieves any of its intended results, two further, and major, problems can be connected to this funding approach. The first is the funding instability it creates for institutions. The bigger the percentage of an institution's annual budget tied to annual indications of performance (which often fluctuates due to external factors), the greater the uncertainty with which institutions must contend. This would undoubtedly wreak havoc with the steady functioning necessary for the success of our PSE institutions.

The second major problem with outcomes-based funding is the incentive that it provides for steering in the direction of what is financially rewarded. If numerical indicators like enrollment numbers, pass rates, or retention rates are used as the only funding parameters, there is little that prevents institutions from seeking good performance in these dimensions irrespective of what that does to the quality of delivery of its core mandate. Especially in difficult economic conditions, pressure to perform on numerical indicators for the sake of simply surviving may lead to institutions increasingly “doing what is necessary” and giving less attention as to their specified mandates under the six sector model.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

ACIFA encourages any funding review body to:

- Recognize and identify the fundamental and long-term prosperity, stability, and overall well-being that good post-secondary education (PSE) provides to the individual and to society over both the short and long term.
- Revisit the specific mandates of each PSE institute in the province and ensure that diversity in the system is maintained by preventing cross-institutional mandate creep. This should be accomplished in consultation with both the management and the faculty association at each institution.
- Align funding with the core mandates of PSE institutions, but not conflate this with performance-based or outcomes-based funding.
- Take due notice of the fundamental need of the PSE sector for stable and predictable funding over the longer-than-annual time horizon for optimally delivering its services. This requires a commitment to funding for a three-to-five year time period and to sparing PSE institutions from annual, or irregular, fluctuations in their funding.
- Recognize the contextual differences between PSE institutions. The role of rural institutes in the broader cultural life of remote communities should be acknowledged, included in their mandates, and funded accordingly. Similarly, the enrollment pressure of urban institutions should also be recognized and reflected in their funding.
- Identify where research is part of the mandate of a teaching institution, and specifically earmark resources for research purposes as intended.

Finally, we realize it has been almost two decades since the last funding review was completed in Alberta. While ACIFA appreciates the necessity of funding reviews, we also appreciate the complexity of such an undertaking as well as the long-term consequences for our sector. Given all of the complexities of a funding review and its potential consequences, we encourage the government and any funding review body to proceed cautiously and pursue extensive consultation.

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# ACIFA's Position on Student Evaluations

## Overview

Student opinion surveys on instructors, also known as student evaluations, are widely used. In most cases they take the form of students grading an instructor's performance on a scale from one to five.

There are two main questions with regard to student evaluations: what are their appropriate uses (and what are not), and for what constructive purposes can the results of these evaluations be legitimately used?

This opinion piece will make clear that the current applications and uses of student evaluations are often inappropriate and do not deliver on their assumed contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning. More often than not, they contribute to potentially negative effects on the work and morale of teaching staff. This occurs due to a variety of unintended limitations of how the evaluations are designed and applied—some are inherent to the process of evaluation and others are due to the glaring deficiencies in their statistical characteristics.

## Biases Within Student Evaluations

Student evaluations are actually opinion polls of student likes and dislikes and not the objective assessment of teaching quality and performance that they are touted to be. As instruments of assessment with regard to teaching effectiveness, these student opinion surveys are imperfect at best, because they are fraught with prejudice and bias including:

- Student grade expectations (e.g., Boring et al., 2016; Marsh and Cooper, 1980);
- The nature of the course material, e.g. instructors who teach courses with mathematical content often receive lower ratings (Uttl et al., 2013);
- The level of the course and whether the course is required (e.g., Marsh and Roche, 1997);
- The course format (Lake, 2001);
- The instructor's gender (Arbuckle and Williams, 2003; Basow et al., 2013; Bianchini et al., 2013);

Boring, 2015; Boring et al., 2016; MacNeill et al., 2015);

- The instructor's age (Arbuckle and Williams, 2003; Bianchini et al., 2013);
- The instructor's attractiveness (Wolbring and Riordan, 2016);
- The instructor's expressiveness (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1993; Williams and Ceci, 1997);
- The instructor's race (Archibeque, 2014, and citations therein; Basow et al., 2013);
- Whether the instructor speaks with an accent or is a native speaker (Subtirelu, 2015); and
- The physical condition of the classroom (Hill and Epps, 2010).

All of the factors above can, and usually do, play a significant—mostly negative—role in the evaluation of instructors, rather than actually contributing to improved course delivery. Unwarranted biases (like those indicated above) essentially invalidate any objective basis upon which to improve course delivery. In fact, evidence has now come to light that these biases can be so insidious that more effective teachers often receive lower ratings than less effective teachers (Boring et al., 2016). This counter-intuitive result can arise because students are rarely in a position to meaningfully comment on the role a particular course plays within the larger curriculum of a program, and they are unable to judge the degree to which course content reflects the state of knowledge within a discipline.



## Methodological Limitations

Aside from the challenges to objectivity that these biases and prejudices present, another major issue is that they are rarely subjected to the methodological scrutiny necessary to establish reliability. An example of this methodological limitation is how statistically misleading it is to average and compare scores across courses, instructors, disciplines, and so on (Stark and Freishtat, 2014).

The questions used on these surveys are assessed using nominal variables placed in a specific categorical order. Frequently used are: “strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree.” While it is common to replace these category names with numbers and place them in a specific order (for instance, using “1” to signify “strongly disagree” and “5” to signify “strongly agree”), the numbers themselves are not quantities, but merely labels: they are codes which happen to be numerical. The actual magnitudes of the numbers are meaningless in this context, and only serve as arbitrary labels. Averaging such number-labels is statistically meaningless and misleading. For an average to be meaningful, the averaged variables must be interval variables. With interval variables, the difference between 1 and 2 is equivalent to the difference between a 4 and 5, just as the difference between 0 and 10°C is equivalent to the difference between 20 and 30°C. However, the ordered set of number-labels used in student evaluations is ordinal—they are not interval variables. Philip Stark summarized this limitation well when he said: “...adding or subtracting labels from each other does not make sense, any more than it makes sense to add or average postal codes” (Stark, 2016). Reporting the averages on student evaluations to several digits gives the illusion of scientific precision, but it is actually devoid of meaning and cannot accurately reflect teaching effectiveness at all!

With regard to the increasingly popular online student surveys, another methodological limitation becomes apparent: low participation rates. Low rates of participation hamper any possible interpretation regarding teaching effectiveness. The main reason why participation rates are usually very low is

because students self-select. That is, students only complete these online surveys if they have strong feelings about their experience in the course—they either *really* liked it, or they *really* disliked it. These evaluations therefore often depict a confusing bimodal distribution of student opinions.

## Additional Factors Relevant to Quality Teaching

An instructor can control some, but by no means all, of the many variables that affect student learning and student satisfaction. Teaching relies on the quality and cooperation of libraries, computing centres, laboratories, bookstores, and administrative support, in addition to student ability and motivation for enrolling in a specific course. Thus, a good student experience in a course is not dependent solely on the role of the instructor, but also on the direct and indirect support from other parts of the teaching environment. And yet, the instructor alone is almost always held accountable for the results of the evaluation reflected in the student survey!

As has been indicated above, the larger context of a program of study determines what courses are offered at what level. These decisions are not usually made by the instructor and fall outside the instructor's sphere of influence. Instructors who teach more difficult content (often in required courses) face a greater probability than their colleagues of being judged less favourably by their students. Uncomplimentary student experiences in more difficult courses are then ascribed to the instructor, whether or not that instructor had much latitude about course content, required readings, course objectives, or evaluation methods.

Given the biases, prejudices, statistical incoherence, lack of participation, and influences upon student experience which lie beyond the instructor's ability to control, student evaluations as instruments to determine the quality and efficacy of teaching are imperfect at best, and unreliable and unfair at worst.

### Inappropriate Use

Despite the evidence that student evaluations are an inappropriate tool in assessing instructor quality and effectiveness, student evaluations may give information with regard to an individual student's general educational experience at the school. However, because of the limitations of student evaluations, a considerable amount of caution should be observed regarding the use of these evaluations by management to determine the treatment of academic staff. This is particularly true regarding decisions on promotion or discipline; student evaluations should never be used for these reasons, nor as a reason to dismiss an instructor.

In this regard it is instructive to note the 2018 arbitration decision in a dispute between Ryerson University Management and its Faculty Association. The arbitrator, William Kaplan, came to the conclusion that student evaluations cannot be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness for promotion or tenure. He further determined that using student evaluations as a tool for assessing teaching effectiveness is flawed and has limited use in evaluating the quality of education provided because it does not assess student learning, only the students' learning experience.

### Appropriate Use

The only appropriate use of student evaluations is to provide feedback to instructors which will enable them to improve their pedagogy—to refine and improve their craft. Teaching evaluations by students for this purpose can play a valuable role as a professional development tool. For example, they may provide feedback on an instructor's ability to clearly communicate complicated concepts, or the timeliness with which assignments are returned to students. Such information collected from students is best provided confidentially to the instructor only. If the instructor finds valuable feedback in the student assessments, assistance (if requested) must be available to permit instructors to modify their instructional techniques on the basis of the feedback received.



### Recommendations to Instructors

- Keep a record of your accomplishments in teaching. Keep your student evaluations, teaching observation, feedback, and evaluations completed by peers. This will be useful to you, in the case where you find it necessary to appeal a punitive decision which was based on a small sample (such as one cohort) of negative student feedback. The procedure normally used by appeal panels is to require the submission of persuasive evidence. Evidence of past teaching effectiveness will help to convince an appeal panel that you are an effective teacher if your reputation is questioned.
- Keep track of specific, anecdotal examples of student success. Write down examples of students who benefited from your teaching style, who were appreciative of the concrete examples you used in class to clarify complicated concepts, and who praised the case studies you used or the creative assessments methods you employed—be specific.
- Keep all emails and letters you receive from former students who have already graduated, from their parents and current employers, and from work-study or cooperative program students.
- Keep track of any invitations you receive from outside agencies with offers to teach for them.
- Don't be too modest. Keep copies of any recognition you received for teaching excellence—recognitions such as instructional excellence nominations or media interviews about successful teaching innovations.
- Perform regular checks of student satisfaction during a course. This may provide valuable and timely feedback toward achieving your professional development goals rather than waiting for student evaluations at the end of a course.
- Almost all colleges now have centres for teaching effectiveness that play an active role in promoting teaching. Such centres can be a valuable resource for instructors. You may wish to make use of their services in order to enrich your teaching, enhance your lesson planning, or explore untried teaching methodologies.



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## ACIFA's Position on Academic Freedom



## ACIFA's Position on Academic Freedom

### Introduction and Background

Academic freedom is the essential requirement of true study and teaching to ensure that intellectual inquiry is unencumbered in order to fulfill the crucial mission of academia: to safeguard the non-partisan furtherance of knowledge. This principle evolved from the 12th century onward, and its comprehensive development was realized during the Enlightenment.

For polytechnics and colleges in Canada that experienced rapid development beginning in the 1960s, the concept of academic freedom has been a distant consideration; it has become increasingly important as the distinction between post-secondary educational systems has begun to blur. In Alberta, ACIFA affiliated schools have had a broader educational focus beyond vocational training for some time now. With degree programming as well as applied research becoming increasingly integral, the colleges and institutions of Alberta now have a greater need to embrace and claim academic freedom.

### Is Academic Freedom Under Threat?

Academic freedom has often been a controversial subject. Over the years academic freedom has been challenged and constrained by church, state, governing body, and parental interference. Today we can add political correctness, respectful workplace policies, and even the reigning political philosophy of neo-liberalism, which often views post-secondary institutions as mere producers of ready-made functionaries for current economic objectives. We must guard against these challenges and constraints.

If you are fortunate enough to have a significant level of academic freedom at your institution, you should not take it for granted. Attempts to impinge on, or erode academic freedom continue to echo through post-secondary policymaking. One of the major reasons for the job action taken by 12,000 Ontario college instructors in 2017 was to assert their rights of academic freedom.

At that time, in the Ontario college system, faculty had to contend with increasing levels of interference from management in what they teach, how they deliver their classes, and how they assess their students.

### Academic Freedom: What Does It Really Mean?

At a bare minimum, academic freedom means that faculty have autonomy in their classrooms to prescribe learning materials and pick assessment and evaluation methods as they see fit—without undue influence or pressure from supervisors. Faculty should be free to examine, test, and convey all knowledge appropriate to their disciplines even if such knowledge is inconvenient to special interest groups or authorities. In addition, they should feel comfortable presenting such ideas and facts without fear of repression, retaliation, or job or privilege loss.

Academic freedom also includes faculty members' freedom to develop and implement educational curricula and help determine institutional policies and strategic directions. Further, it includes the freedom to criticize the employer where appropriate. Faculty members should also be meaningfully involved in decisions regarding the hiring and evaluation of academic staff, and to use their expertise to publically address issues of the day both as specialists and as citizens. To help accomplish this, faculty members are entitled to have representatives on, and participation in, collegial governing bodies in accordance with their role in fulfilling the institution's academic and educational mission.

### What Academic Freedom Does Not Mean

Given that workload assignment remains a management right, faculty only have the right to prescribe learning materials and pick assessments/evaluation methods as they see fit subsequent to such assignment. Even then, this must typically happen in collaboration with other instructors who are teaching the same courses.



## ACIFA's Position on Academic Freedom

Academic freedom does not imply that others cannot judge or criticize a faculty member's scholarly or educational work. It is through robust critical peer review that the value and soundness of academic endeavors and research are established: challenges spur innovation!

In addition, academic freedom for any individual cannot limit the rightful academic freedom of others through harassment, threatening behavior, the ridiculing of students or colleagues, or the imposition of one's own personal views on them. Nor does it protect faculty members from sanctions due to professional misconduct, repeatedly missing or canceling classes, or refusing to teach assigned classes.

In short, academic freedom does not give faculty or students the right to ignore college or university regulations, nor does it shelter faculty or students from disciplinary action, but it does require that they receive fair treatment and due process, and it does bestow the right to criticize regulations that they believe are undue or unfair.

### Why Does Academic Freedom Matter?

Academic freedom is essential to achieve the mission of academia because it enables academic staff to do their work in serving their societies' interests by allowing the following:

- Faculty to engage in intellectual debate with each other and their students without fear of censorship or retaliation;
- The protection of faculty members' right to practise their pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitments;
- Faculty and students the right to study and perform research on topics of their choosing without pressure from corporations or government sponsors to block dissemination of research findings;

- Protection from reprisals for respectful disagreement with administrative policies or proposals;
- Freedom from imposition of the political, religious or philosophical beliefs of politicians and administrators upon faculty or students;
- The preservation of the intellectual integrity of an educational system and by so doing serve the public good.

### Academic Freedom Comes with Responsibility

While the freedoms extolled above are fundamental, it must be recognized that their pursuit equally demands the responsibility of faculty to exercise them with appropriate restraint and wisdom and with due appreciation of the larger purpose of their institutions. In particular, when speaking publicly on contentious issues, faculty should clearly indicate that they are not speaking for their institution. Their special position in the community imposes the obligation to bear in mind that their profession and institution will be judged by the public from their utterances.

Although academic freedom does not require neutrality on the part of the individual exercising that freedom, we must maintain civility in dialogue and keep in mind that academic subjects are determined by academic bodies. Meaningful academic work, including questioning and debating approaches, viewpoints, and policies, often entails criticism. But criticism remains the art of comparing against some standard and an open mind should be kept about the latter. In contentious situations it is wise to remember that truth is not the exclusive possession of any individual, and we must therefore be reasonable if and when we challenge orthodoxy.

### Who Has the Responsibility to Protect Academic Freedom?

Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC), in its handbook, states that an institution must ensure that it maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom exists. That is, the institution must recognize and protect the right of the individual in the honest pursuit of knowledge, wherever such knowledge is to be found, without fear of reprisal by the institution or by third parties.

In the college and technical institute sector, we have academic councils. Our academic councils deliberate about academic matters such as program priorities and performance measures, but unlike their counterparts in the university sector, they only have advisory power. ACIFA is lobbying the Alberta government for greater authority for our academic councils. These powers must be enshrined in legislation similar to the way it currently is in BC. An increase in the authority of academic councils is an important step in the strengthening of faculty voices and the protection of academic freedom.



### Artificial Limits

We should resist the limitations placed on academic freedom by over-reaching “respectful workplace policies.” Such policies have restricted faculty members’ ability to speak up by demanding that faculty act in accordance with often ill-defined notions of respect, civility, and concern for the dignity of others. These often vague policies can lead to artificial limitations being placed on academic freedom because too often these respectful workplace policies bundle the requirement for respect or civility with anti-harassment language. The result of this approach is the production of a comprehensive harassment policy that covers a very broad spectrum of speech and behaviour, from perceived rudeness to sexual harassment.

The result is that this over-riding obligation to maintain civility and respect is forced in with the legally mandated requirements to address harassment, discrimination, and workplace violence. However, conflating vague notions of civility outlined in many respectful workplace policies with the requirements of the law unduly restricts academic freedom.

### Conclusion

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) argues that “The common good depends upon the search for truth and its free exposition.” To achieve that, academic freedom must be honoured by all who are involved in the academic enterprise.



## ACIFA's Position on Academic Freedom

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ACIFA's spring conference final banquet, May 2018, Jasper Park Lodge